

Playing Chess with Other People's Life

Theresa Sanyatwe

Chess is a fascinating mental game. It requires one to think carefully about the moves to make in defence or in the offensive in order to attain a position of advantage to win. In a game of chess there are pawns, knights, bishops, king and queen. The aim of the game is to protect one's king while trying to capture the opponent's king. In doing that the pawns and all other pieces are sacrificed for the safety or defence of the king. In the strategy of defending the honour of special pieces the pawns are sacrificed. Henceforth, playing chess with other people's life is an analogy used here to express the art of the manipulation of the other people in trying to achieve certain status in life. The poor and the vulnerable are sacrificed for the benefit of those in high ranks and status in society. This portrays lack of responsibility, accountability and transparency in all situations of life. In such circumstances human life is disrespected and injustices swizzes souls of innocent people.

For Christians, human beings are created in the Image of God; so human life is a sacred gift from God, which must be valued, respected and protected. Therefore, any form of manipulation of human persons for personal goals is morally wrong. The Second Formulation of Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative states, "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any oth-

er, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end" (Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, 1993). Some people violate others by adopting lifestyles that are driven by the desire for self-gratification. In the world of literature different authors portray different types of corruption and the response to that 'pandemic'. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1983) portrays different types of corruption. Mr Jones of Manor Farm mistreated animals at his farm. Consequently, they rebelled against him and overtook the farm from him. The pigs became administrators and drafted rules to keep animals united and to protest against human beings who had mistreated them. The rules were as follows:

1. Whatever goes upon two legs is an enemy.
2. Whatever goes upon four legs, has wings, is a friend.
3. No animal shall wear clothes.
4. No animal shall sleep in a bed.
5. No animal shall drink alcohol.
6. No animal shall kill any other animal.
7. All animals are equal.

But the pigs nocturnally altered some of the rules to suit their intention, "NO animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets", and when challenged by other animals they defended themselves by saying that, a bed merely means a place to sleep in and the rule was

against sheets, which are a human invention. We have removed the sheets from the farmhouse beds, and sleep between blankets. One of the pigs in charge was expelled from the farm. Their new leader, Napoleon, who became even more corrupt, led to the downfall of Manor Farm.

Musengezi, a Zimbabwean author, portrays another type of corruption in the play *The Honourable MP* (1987). The play features the protagonist Shakespeare Pfende, who is a member of parliament. Pfende brags about having upper class friends like ministers, diplomats and directors of multi-national companies, who respect him for his status. Pfende's snobbery and exhibitionist character is depicted when he boasts of buying a television, tape and radio from France for his girlfriend Isabella, even though these items are locally available. Pfende does not pay import duty, and intimidates customs officials who dare question his imports.

Pfende's materialistic appetite and disregard for his duties infuriates people, yet he wants them to vote for him. A teacher reports to the villagers of the constituency that Pfende bought himself a European mansion, three brand new cars and a farm at Beatrice. When the MP finally meets the angry people a peasant bluntly tells him that he is a cheat who does not deserve to represent the people. He is accused of hiding in the city. A peasant woman draws Pfende's

attention to a group of scrawny children dying of kwashiorkor, diarrhoea, hunger and thirst.

When Pfende responds violently by threatening to shoot the woman with a pistol, the teacher jumps and kicks the pistol away with his right foot. Taking the pistol and pointing it at the MP, the teacher announces that Pfende is under citizen arrest for preaching socialism during the day and practising capitalism at night. Pfende collapses and faints. One of the peasants who undresses the MP complains that: 'he stinks like a pile of rotten bones'.

Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) portrays one man's effort to resist corruption and to stay clean. The novel's protagonist encounters various people such as a bus driver, his fellow railway workers, a timber merchant who attempts to bribe him and his wife Oyo. Everywhere he goes he encounters moral, physical and spiritual corruption, for instance the bus driver who steals from the company. With great forcefulness using misshapen language, Armah mocks all that is rotten in the world of hypocrites; lost opportunities, and the enormous economic gap caused by the few with all the money and power through either bribing or embezzling.

At the root of pandemic of corruption is the desire for personal, family, ethnic or class advantage. This inherent desire to preserve oneself and those of one's kind has serious moral and econom-

ic implications. The economic problem is also a moral problem. Francis Bacon is said to have justified his corrupt practices on the argument that everyone did it. He was the unlucky one who got caught. In other words, if the whole system is corrupt, then, is it justifiable for a particular individual to be caught and tried? Of course, just because every thief in the world cannot be caught (or has not been caught) does it mean that a caught thief will not be punished? (Marbaniang, 2019).

The Catholic Church lists greed as one of the seven deadly sins. The Latin word for greed is *avaritia*, from which comes the English, *avarice*, meaning an extremely strong inordinate desire, to get or keep money or possessions. In our society today, there are people who attempt to justify corruption on empirical and pragmatic grounds. Some go to the extent of claiming that corruption functions as the grease of economic growth (Pierre-Gillaume Meon & Khalid Sekkat, 2005). However, contemporary empirical studies show that corruption is not seen as grease but as sand on the wheels of growth (Johann Graf Lambsdorff, 2017). Burmese economist U Myint proposes a corruption equation that predicts corruption as a result of economic and political opportunity minus accountability. The equation is: $C=R+D-A$. In this equation C stands for Corruption, R for Economic Rent, D for Discretionary Powers, and A for Accountability. Economic rent is defined as the extra profit that

someone tries to earn due to his or her advantageous position in any situation of life. For example, if a secretary does not forward a file, it may never reach the desk of the manager or director, so, he or she seeks some extra profit over and above their salary, thus benefiting themselves because of the position they hold. A similar experience has become rife in Zimbabwe. If that secretary also possesses some discretionary powers to decide whose file to attend to and not to attend to, then the sum of his or her powers and positions add up to a high potential for corruption (U Myint, 2000). Myint also points out that, if there is no proper mechanism to hold the secretary accountable for his or her actions, then his/her powers are almost absolute, and, power without accountability tends towards corruption. In the words of Lord Acton, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely". One can imagine the havoc that corruption can let loose on a nation when such unaccountable and unmonitored powers and positions are given to administrators, managers, directors, or any office holder of high rank in Zimbabwe country today.

Thus, Myint says, "The equation states that the more opportunities for economic rent (R) exist in a country, the larger will be the corruption. Similarly, the greater the discretionary (unrestricted) powers (D) granted to administrators, the greater will be the corruption. However, the more administrators are held accountable (A) for their actions, the less will be the cor-



ruption, and hence a minus sign in front of A” (U Myint, 2000). In the modern scheme of understanding, corruption is defined as an interest, private or public that is out of place or is in the wrong place. In the words of Mary Douglas (2003), “Shoes are not dirty in themselves, but it is dirty to place them on the dining-table; food is not dirty in itself, but it is dirty to leave cooking utensils in the bedroom, or food bespattered on clothing...” We see many holders of high ranks and those who possess special status in our country today confusing roles. Many people have become opportunistic. Corruption is normalised at the expense of human dignity. Best practices of governance have been buried under the deep sea of immorality and injustices. Innocent souls are sacrificed like pawns in a game of chess to defend the status

of privileged people in our society today. They are meant to celebrate and clap hands while they are sprayed with chilli in their eyes. They are covered with lies and cunning whilst the players of the game protect their special pieces as experienced in chess game. In conclusion, we can draw lessons from the Bible about the possibilities of reformation and restoration. Anything that remains stagnant rots; hence the call for reformation and resto-

ration. When corruption is rife, it undermines not only individuals but also systems with the effect that education standards plummet; the judicial system convicts the innocent and let the criminals go scot-free. In such a scenario people will no longer rely on integrity but on who they know or how much they can pay. Ordinary people easily become the pawns that are sacrificed on the altar of greed in the corruption chess game.

Vision Statement

Mukai- Vukani (“Arise”) magazine for the Jesuit Province of Zimbabwe-Mozambique serves as a magazine for theological reflection for Jesuits in the said Province and their friends. It seeks to help in finding the *direction of life in the light of the Word of God at any given time*. In this way the magazine facilitates dialogue among Jesuits and their friends based on study, prayer and discernment.